

REMARKS

Claims 1-7 are now pending in the application. Claims 1 and 7 are amended. Claim 8 is cancelled. The Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw the rejections in view of the amendments and remarks contained herein.

Applicants' representatives thank the Examiner's Supervisor, Matthew Smith, during the telephone interview of January 30, 2007. The amendments to the claims set forth above were discussed in light of Berner, U.S. Pat. 6,440,178. An agreement was not reached. However, the Examiner's Supervisor noted that he would discuss the telephone interview with the Examiner.

REJECTION UNDER 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 1-8 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Berner, U.S. Pat. 6,440,178. With respect to claim 8, the rejection is rendered moot by cancellation. With respect to claims 1-7, the rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 1 recites a manufacturing apparatus for manufacturing an intermediate product comprising a plurality of process modules, an inter-process carrying means, and a plurality of loaders. Each process module includes a plurality of processing means arranged along a first side and a second side of an intra-process carrying conveyor. The processing means are arranged at locations corresponding to an order of processes to be performed on the intermediate products, such that a sequence of the locations of the plurality of processing means along the first and second sides of the intra-process carrying conveyor corresponds to a sequence of the order of processes to be performed on the intermediate products by the plurality of processing means. The series of

processes to be performed is completed during a single circulation along the first side and the second side by first performing processes, according to the sequence of the order of processes, with the processing means arranged along the first side and, after performing the processes with the processing means arranged along the first side, then performing processes, according to the sequence of the order of processes, with the plurality of processing means arranged along the second side. Berner et al. fails to teach the manufacturing apparatus recited by Claim 1.

Berner et al. describes a processing tool, but is silent as to any specific sequencing or ordering of processing means located along first and second sides of intra-process carrying means. Berner et al. describes that various liquid and gaseous processing steps can be used “in various sequences,” but is silent as to any particular sequence, ordering, or arrangement of processing steps within the processing tool. Berner et al., Col. 9, Lines 54-56. Berner is likewise silent as to completing a series of processes during a single circulation of intermediate products along a first side and second side of on an intra-process conveyor.

Further, Berner et al. is silent as to a plurality of processing means, each having a robot for acquiring and returning the intermediate products to intra-process carrying means, and as to each having a mini-buffer for temporarily storing intermediate products.

For these reasons, Berner et al. does not teach or suggest each and every limitation recited by claim 1. With regard to claims 2-6, Applicants notes that each either directly or indirectly depends from claim 1, which defines over the prior art as discussed above. Therefore, claims 2-6, also define over the prior art. Reconsideration and withdrawal of these rejections are respectfully requested.

Claim 7 recites a manufacturing method comprising an inter-process carrying step, a loading step, an intra-process carrying step, and a processing step. The intra-process carrying step includes carrying intermediate products won an intra-process conveyor. The processing step includes performing a plurality of processes by a plurality of processing means. The plurality of processing means are arranged along the first side and the second side of the intra-process conveyor at locations corresponding to an order of processes to be performed on the intermediate products. A sequence of the locations of the plurality of processing means along the first and second sides of the intra-process carrying conveyor corresponds to a sequence of the order of processes to be performed on the intermediate products by the plurality of processing means. The series of processes is completed during a single circulation on the intra-process conveyor.

Similar limitations are recited by claim 1, discussed above. For at least the above reasons, claim 7 defines over the prior art. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection are respectfully requested.

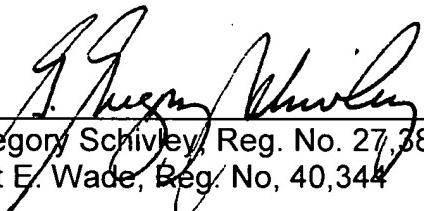
CONCLUSION

It is believed that all of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. Applicants therefore respectfully request that the Examiner reconsider and withdraw all presently outstanding rejections. It is believed that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action and the present application is in condition for allowance. Thus, prompt and favorable consideration of this amendment is respectfully requested. If the Examiner

believes that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at (248) 641-1600.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: February 1, 2007

By: 
G. Gregory Schivley, Reg. No. 27,382
Bryant E. Wade, Reg. No. 40,344

HARNESS, DICKEY & PIERCE, P.L.C.
P.O. Box 828
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48303
(248) 641-1600

GGS/BEW/MPD/cn